

The University of Chicago

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION IN THE
LIGHT OF THE ANALYSIS OF SIGNS

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

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THE ANALYSIS OF SIGNS

Considerable interest has been shown in recent years in problems relating to the nature of religious symbolism and the role of language in religion. Philosophers of religion, however, have almost invariably neglected the approach to the study of signs developed by the American logician who has most persistently pursued this study, namely, Charles Sanders Peirce.¹ Fortunately, this neglect has not been universal outside the bounds of philosophy of religion. One of the basic monographs for the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science is an essay of Charles W. Morris in which the work of Peirce is systematized and expanded into a general theory of signs.² In the light of this neglect on the part of philosophers of religion it is imperative that attention be focused upon this approach lest a methodological aid be overlooked that may prove to be of considerable importance. This paper aims to bring the method of sign analysis to the attention of the philosopher of religion by indicating some of the results of an attempted application.³

Obviously, a methodology can be serviceable to philosophy of religion only to the extent that it contributes to the solution of problems in that particular field of inquiry. When philosophy

¹See especially, Charles Sanders Peirce, Collected Papers, Vol. II, Elements of Logic, ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), pp. 129-269. In Wilbur Urban's comprehensive book, Language and Reality, Peirce's name is mentioned only once in the index and then only for a very incidental reference.

²Charles W. Morris, Foundations of the Theory of Signs, Vol. I, No. 2 of International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, ed. Otto Neurath (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938-).

³See the author's "Sign Analysis as a Method for Philosophy of Religion" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1940). The writer is especially indebted to Henry N. Wieman and Charles W. Morris, of the University of Chicago, who offered indispensable aid in the preparation of the dissertation mentioned.

of religion is considered from the point of view of the philosophical study of language there are two problems which can be regarded as of basic importance, namely, (1) What is the nature of religious discourse? (2) What is the nature of differences of opinion on religious meanings as seen in the discourse of theological controversy? These problems, it will be noted, are related to two comprehensive categories of religious discourse, that is, the discourse that arises from religious living and the discourse that arises from thinking about religion. When we are confronted with discourse that arises from religious living, the discourse of devotion, for example, the question of the nature of religious discourse is brought to our attention. When we are confronted with discourse that arises from thinking about religion, the problem of the variety of opinions on the question of religious meanings sooner or later arises and assumes crucial importance. The extent to which the technique of sign analysis can be of service in the consideration of these problems should give the philosopher of religion considerable data for determining the extent of the usefulness of sign analysis in this field.

It is evident that religious discourse covers a broad scope of propositions. Generally speaking, there are two chief levels of religious interests and consequently two comprehensive levels of religious discourse. The first level, from which types of pure or intrinsic religious discourse arise, involves religious living in terms of a presupposed creative source of values. The second level, from which types of intellectual or extrinsic religious discourse arise, involves thinking about the value-system¹ and its creative source and thinking about religious living in order that ways and means may be discovered for bringing life under control of this creativity of value. On the level of pure religious discourse we have the discourse of myth, worship, and preaching, or the discourse of the seer, the priest, and the prophet. On the level of intellectual religious discourse we find the discourse of theology, liturgics, and religious morality. For a secular culture, the latter level of discourse might take the analogous forms of the dis-

¹The term "value-system" is used to designate the sum-total of the hopes, interests, and desires of an individual or a group of individuals at any given moment. The term "value-structure" is used to designate that complex of events in the universe that is responsive or that can possibly become responsive for the realization of a value-system.

course of metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics. These levels of discourse involve the whole living of the whole personality, just as religion in the broadest sense involves the totality of interests of the personality. Religious living involves the act of yielding allegiance to the enthrallment of a value-system or creative source of value, the expressing of devotion, and the directing of energy toward the fulfilment of the possibilities of the value-system or the source of value. Religious thinking is different from these functions, and yet it involves all of them and conditions all of them, as it in turn is conditioned by them.

The Nature of Religious Discourse

There appears to be very little in religious discourse as language to distinguish it from other types of language. Just as there is no such thing in human nature as a specialized religious faculty, so there is no such thing as a specialized religious language. Terms commonly regarded as religious may function as ejaculatory swear words, for example, while other terms that ordinarily have no religious connotations may come to function as religious terms. This, for example, is the case with the term "Volk" in German nationalistic ideology. The basic criteria for distinguishing religious discourse must be stated in terms of the function of the discourse and not in terms of linguistic structure or the uniqueness of the vocabulary of religion.

At least three characteristics of religious discourse emerge as distinctive. In the first place, analysis of the semantical dimension¹ of such terms as "our Father," "thy Holy Spirit," "Heaven," "Christ our Redeemer" indicates the use of signs in the semantical dimension to designate accepted facts of a religious tradition. In the second place, the values that religious discourse transmits differ from other types of values. Finally, there is a persistent "ought" element in religious discourse that differs from the "ought" element in other types of discourse. Thus the distinctive characteristics of religious discourse must be sought in the peculiarity of the semantical referents of religious signs, the distinctive

¹According to Morris there are three dimensions of sign operation. The relation of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable is the semantical dimension. The relation of signs to the interpreters who use and respond to the signs is the pragmatical dimension. The relation of signs to other signs is the syntactical dimension.

nature of religious values, and the uniqueness of the ends that religion attempts to achieve as a technique.

The referents of many of the basic signs of religious discourse are facts of a religious tradition. This tradition has its origin in a religious myth which the adherents of a religion regard as a true representation of the value-structures of the universe. The basic religious discourse of the myth emerges as man's effort to give form and conceptualized meaning to the values for which man strives. If these values are not given conceptualized structural form man tends to lose sight of goals and his life becomes purposeless and meaningless. Myth, theology, ideology tend to conceptualize value-systems so that man can co-operate as a sign-using animal in the fulfilment of the possibilities of a value-system. Moreover, there arises the possibility and, indeed, the necessity of comparison of different types of value-systems.

Basic religious myths¹ have their origins in the life and experience of individual religious geniuses or they may be the products of communal experience. Both factors are usually operative in the creation of a new myth. Mystical experience, especially the experience of the "numinous," so frequently mentioned by writers on religious psychology, plays an especially important role as one of the sources of the basic myth. The uniqueness of the semantical referents of many of the signs in religious discourse rests ultimately upon the experience of the mysterium tremendum of some prophet or seer. This experience is itself frequently regarded as a sign of something "Wholly Other" acting upon man. Religious poetry and myth arise as an attempt to give conceptualized meaning to this intuitive experience by means of metaphorical representation.

The experience of the "numinous" of the individual may be responsible for the origin of a myth; but in the end myths are adopted by the community as religious symbols only as a result of social effectiveness. The value-structures that are represented in the myth are tested in the light of the striving of the group to achieve the fulfilment of the values of an ever expanding value-system. If the myth is instrumentally effective in enhancing these values, it is accepted by the group as a true representation of the structures

¹The term "myth" is used here as a very general term to designate any pictorial, metaphorical, symbolical, or abstract conceptualization of the value-structures of the universe. Myth is to be identified essentially with an individual's world-view in this usage.

of the universe. The distinctive characteristic of the semantical dimension of meaning in religious discourse points to the individual's experience of the "numinous" and the group's tendency to hypostatize value-structures in the form of myth.

A second distinctive characteristic of religious discourse rests in the apparent uniqueness of the values that religious discourse attempts to transmit to the interpreter. Aesthetic values may be transmitted by religious discourse, although this is not its primary function. There is likewise a close connection between the discourse of religion and that of morality. Here again, however, we cannot equate religious values with moral values without impoverishing religion. Religious discourse does not transmit a separate class of religious values. Religions offer perspectives by which all values may be grasped, tested, judged, and ordered. This perspective, which is essentially a means by which man can evaluate values, is in itself the highest value for the religious man. For the religious man it is "the Will of God," "the Law of Christ," "the categorical imperative." No single type of religious discourse can transmit this value. This is rather one of the inherent functions of all religious discourse. Here again religion shows itself to be an attempt at grasping the totality of meanings and values. At this point, however, the negative side of historic religions also comes to the forefront. Different religions have different perspectives for valuation, different conceptions of what is of ultimate importance for man, different hierarchies of value, and different conceptions of dis-value. Here the "thou shalt not" of the dogmatic impervious myth of one religion stands over against the "thou shalt" of another religious myth.

A third distinctive characteristic of religious discourse rests in the peculiar qualities that religious discourse possesses as "technological" discourse. Religion is distinctive in that it is a technique for evaluating value-systems as to their correspondence with the value-structures of the universe, in that it is a technique for inspiring an interest in and devotion to those value-structures which are of greatest importance to man, and in that it is a technique for exploiting the totality of the possibilities of the most comprehensive value-system which man has as yet discovered to be in line with the value-structures of the universe. In traditional theological terminology we might state this in a different way by saying that religion is a technique for knowing the nature and will

of God, a technique for inspiring love to God, and a technique for bringing the Kingdom of God to earth as it is in heaven. Normatively speaking, religion ought to be a technique for testing myths in order that a true religious myth may be constructed. It ought to offer a means for inspiring devotion to the object of devotion symbolized in the true myth. It ought to afford ways by which the true myth might be made operative for human living.

If we consider morality as an interest in the maximum satisfaction of interest we are made aware immediately of its close connection with religion. Morality is the third phase of religion as technique. Religion, however, is more comprehensive and is inclusive of morality. There may be truncated religions in which the sphere of moral values has no place, while, on the other hand, morality may become independent of religion. These situations, however, are so rare in man's history that they can be considered as very unusual if not abnormal. When the first situation obtains religion loses its hold upon men because it ceases to be ethically and thereby socially effective. It degenerates into magic and superstition. When the second situation obtains, morality is soon forced to take over the functions of religion. It cannot confine its attention to an interest in interests. It is driven to seek for some cosmological, and ultimately for some metaphysical, basis for evaluating conflicting moral systems. Moreover, it must seek to inspire an interest in the maximization of interests, and in order to do this it must function religiously.

Paralleling Morris' three types of primary discourse¹ we can distinguish at least three primary types of religious discourse, namely, religious discourse as statement about a value-system, religious discourse as discourse expressing and generating devotion, and religious discourse as discourse directing religious living.

The first of these types takes the form of myth--myth being considered as a symbolic, figurative representation of the totality of meanings of a value-system that is regarded as comprehensive and worthy of supreme loyalty. The discourse of myth arises in all cultures. It may take the form of a "holy book" or a folk-lore tradi-

¹According to Morris, the primary types of discourse are scientific, aesthetic, and technological. Scientific discourse aims to make statements about things and events that will communicate knowledge. Aesthetic discourse aims to present values. Technological discourse aims to control behavior. See Charles W. Morris, "Science, Art and Technology," The Kenyon Review, I (1939), 409-23.

tion. It may take the form of esoteric pronouncements of a charismatic priesthood. It may consist of a fund of presupposed scientific categories and laws. In any case the myth as a symbolical representation of a value-system enlists ultimate devotion to the religious object and inspires ultimate faith in an object of devotion which sustains the value-structures of the universe. The myth affirms an object or objects of faith exclusive in its demands of loyalty for all who come under its enthrallment, and it sets forth a view of the universe in which the cosmic structures are affirmed to be of such a nature that they support this system of values. The Koran as the discourse of a cultural myth performed this function, for example, for the Moslem world.

Theological discourse in the form of dogmatic treatise or creed arises as discourse about the basic myth. Theology endeavors to make the basic myth intellectually comprehensible and acceptable. The discourse of the myth makes statements about the nature of the value-structures of the universe. The discourse of theology makes statements about these statements and about these structures. Thus both forms of discourse are analogous to scientific discourse.

The second primary type of religious discourse takes the form of the discourse of worship. Worship is a technique by which devotion is aroused, enhanced, and augmented once a myth has been accepted and intellectually comprehended to the point where it rises to the level of linguistic intersubjectivity. The discourse of worship is in a large measure aesthetic discourse, but it is aesthetic discourse functioning as a part of a technique. A prayer, an incantation, a hymn, or a liturgy may transmit aesthetic values. The ultimate aim of the discourse, however, is to influence behavior and attitudes and to induce action. It is a technique for attaining devoted co-operation of all possible forces of creativity in the fulfilment of the presupposed value-system. Worship in the higher religions aims to enlist devotion to the religious object as a means of attaining this end. Worship in the primitive religions aims to use magical techniques to enlist the services of superhuman powers for attaining desired ends.

The third primary type of religious discourse frequently takes the form of the discourse of preaching or of religiously motivated ethics, in so far as both of these types of discourse aim to direct religious living. Moral discourse is technological discourse showing what must be done if the possibilities of a value-system

that is whole-heartedly accepted, intellectually comprehended, and emotionally loved are to be maximized in social relationships. The discourse of worship aims to enlist devotion; moral discourse aims to show how this devotion can be made effective for the individual and for society after it has been enlisted. Moral discourse says that we must act in one way or another if we desire to put the values of our value-system into effective operation. It is thus technological in its nature and functioning. The discourse of preaching usually comes under this heading. However, the aim of the preacher may be to win allegiance of others to the presupposed value-system, which makes it necessary to enumerate another type of religious discourse on a secondary level.

Maximization of the possibilities of a value-system must be attained through some form of social transfusion and co-operation. Converts must be won if the "total good" is to be made fully operative for human living. Thus, there arises a sub-type of moral discourse, that is, discourse which aims to induce the interpreter to yield allegiance to a myth and to that which the myth designates. This type of discourse may become very complex for it frequently involves all the functions of the personality, including willing, feeling, knowing, and doing. On the level of religious living, the discourse may take the form of the discourse of the prayer-meeting or the revival-meeting. The appeal may be made through the emotions, in which case the discourse of worship may become predominant. The preaching of the revivalist minister, for example, shows this tendency. On the level of thinking about religion, the discourse may take the form of theological apologetics or of theological controversy. In that case the appeal is made to a large extent through the intellect, and the discourse of theology assumes a dominant role. In its broadest aspects this type of religious discourse can be considered as discourse of persuasion. It has the pragmatic aim of influencing behavior and of eliciting attitudes of assent.

The possibilities for the interfusion of different types and levels of discourse into extremely intricate and complex forms of religious discourse are almost endless. Aesthetic, scientific, and technological discourse may be interfused in all types of religious discourse on both intrinsic and extrinsic levels. If we take a comprehensive view of the full scope of religious discourse we find that it can be regarded as technological in the broadest sense of that term. Religious discourse aims to state facts, to arouse interest, to control behavior not for the sake of knowing facts or

of enjoying values or of attaining immediate ends, but for the sake of arousing devotion to and co-operation with a religious object so that all possible creative powers can be enlisted and made operative for the maximization of value. A system of values or a creative source of values is presupposed as the ultimate referent for all signs. A form of cosmic creativity or order is presupposed as sustaining this system. All types of religious discourse contribute directly or indirectly to the engendering of devotion to the sustaining religious object. Religious discourse as technology aims to control behavior. It says, Believe thus, worship thus, live thus, and the results will be thus.

Religious discourse uses aesthetic, scientific, and technological discourse as tools for enlisting belief or for arousing interests or for controlling behavior. Religion, however, remains apart as a technique for inspiring an interest in the maximization of interests and a technique for arousing attitudes of receptivity and eliciting devotion to those value-structures that are regarded as of greatest importance for man. Religious discourse on the level of the discourse of religious living is a part of this technique. Ordinarily, religious discourse is not a primary type of discourse but a complex secondary type in which technological elements are predominant but with aesthetic and scientific factors also present.

The various types of religious discourse make different contributions toward achieving the aim of generating devotion to the religious object. The discourse of the myth contains statements which symbolize or express the nature of a value-system and describe the nature of the cosmos which supports this system. These statements usually have aesthetic elements and they can and should have scientific elements. There is nothing to prevent the discourse of the myth from including scientific statements in line with the most exact and accurate information that the culture affords. In the final analysis the discourse of the "holy myth" is discourse with a large aesthetic element that is offered with the hope that it will arouse interest in a presupposed value-system and with the intention of enlisting faith in the cosmic structure supporting these values. From this point of view the myth is technological discourse in so far as it aims to control behavior by arousing belief and thus bring men into the enthrallment of the magnetic field of a certain value-system. The discourse of theology functions in a similar way on the intellectual level.

The discourse of worship makes a much more obvious contribu-

tion toward the ultimate aim of generating devotion to the religious object than does the discourse of the basic myth or the discourse of theology. No religion can function without worship that serves to enlist the corporate devotion of adherents. The forms of worship become deeply rooted in the lives of men and of cultures. They persist as social customs and continue to function in many cases even after the myth that gave rise to them has been abandoned. In other cases the forms are slowly and painfully adapted and modified in order to make them serviceable for a new myth.

Moral discourse and the discourse of persuasion likewise play their indispensable roles in strengthening the functioning power of a religious myth. The myth must be shown to have operative strength for human living if it is to survive. It must likewise destroy the influence of opponents and win adherents if the possibilities of the value-system that it symbolizes are to be realized to the maximum degree. The discourse of morality, apologetics, and of verbal controversy arise to meet these needs.

Metaphorical expressions are found in all types of religious discourse and are deserving of special attention. Although these expressions frequently add to the ambiguity and indefiniteness of the discourse, it can scarcely be said that they are coined for the purpose of creating confusion. They are linguistic techniques which men find useful and indeed indispensable for transmitting religious meanings. These religious meanings are, as we have indicated, aesthetic, cognitive, and instrumental. Aesthetic experiences that are qualitatively rich may be transmitted through the medium of metaphorical representation. Information about the nature of the religious object may be transmitted to the interpreter as cognitive data. Attitudes of devotion toward the religious object may be aroused by metaphorical representations which tend to motivate action along certain lines.

Metaphorical expressions usually operate primarily in the pragmatical dimension, and when that is the case the reactions of the interpreter take the form of feelings. Pragmatical rules of usage for such metaphorical expressions come to be established in every religious group. The expression "the Lamb of God," for example, has had pragmatical rules of usage in Christian circles for many centuries which enables a user of the sign to transmit a wealth of mingled feelings of love, sorrow, and devotion to other Christians. On the other hand, practically all metaphorical expres-

sions operate more or less in the semantical dimension, and in some cases the semantical dimension predominates. Metaphorical representation is indirect representation by analogy. When the expression operates primarily in the semantical dimension, the reaction of the interpreter ordinarily takes the form of an image. In most cases the interpreter would be able to describe these images or to draw some kind of icon of the images that come to mind when these expressions are used. For instance, Bunyan's allegory with its abundance of such expressions, lends itself to imaginative iconic illustration, as can be seen in the pictorial illustrations of the old editions. However, the designatum of the sign is not the image but rather that which is designated by the image. The designata of such images and consequently of such metaphorical expressions are religious "facts." These "religious facts," it would seem, cannot be fully designated except through the instrumentality of metaphorical representation. Needless to say, the metaphor functions satisfactorily in this capacity only to the extent that the interpreter is familiar with the peculiarly complex semantical rules of usage of the religious expression. For instance, the sign "the Lamb of God" may have semantical meaning only to the interpreter reared in the Christian religion.

What is the nature of these "religious facts" that makes it necessary to designate them indirectly by analogy? These "religious facts" are value-structures, that is, they are the complex of the total environmental and social conditions that make for the appreciation and enhancement of value in the life of the individual and the group. Every religion develops its own particular view as to the nature of these value-structures. Every religious tradition is the product of group experience, for every group constructs a hypothetical picture of the nature of the value-structures of the universe. Every religious tradition is in turn modified by the experience of the group as it attempts to come to terms with reality. Religions attempt to give their adherents an instrument by which they can gain comprehensive apperception of the totality of the value-structures of the universe. Religions attempt to give man knowledge of those value-structures that are of ultimate importance for him, and to offer techniques by which man can adjust himself to these structures. Religion must somehow bring man to intellectual awareness of the nature of the totality of the value-structures of the universe, and it must give man

motivation so that the possibilities of these value-structures may be realized. It can do this only by metaphorical representation, for no man can ever experience the totality of the possibilities of value any more than he can experience the totality of the geography of the United States through the sense of sight. Metaphorical representation offers a means of comprehending the totality of value-structures through analogy, just as a map offers a means of comprehending the totality of the nation's geographical structure by means of iconic representation.

The question of the truth of the religious myth is latent in the above. A religious myth is true in so far (1) as it is syntactically consistent with human reason and with the structures of a natural language; (2) as it is pragmatically effective for moving men to action and to directed effort; (3) as it is semantically analogous to the structures of the universe. It is the semantical truth of the myth that is of greatest importance, for it is only on that basis that myths can be tested. A myth is semantically true when it designates structures of events that can be empirically verified. For example, the theory that all men are born in sin as presented in the myth of Adam's fall designates, let us say, "that human nature is such that men are inclined by nature to choose lower values rather than higher values." Since the myth as allegory designates tendencies of human beings in their capacity as creators and destroyers of value-systems, we can test the myth for its truth or falsity by examining human reactions in situations that require a choice of values.

If a myth cannot be shown to be analogous to structures of the universe, that is, if it does not refer to anything that actually exists, it may still have meaning in the pragmatical dimension as aesthetic discourse. It may even have operative power as a religious myth to elicit the supreme devotion of men. Ultimately, however, it will prove to be a false myth; and the religion founded upon it will be an illusion, misdirecting the attention, the energies, and the devotion of men. For example, if Comte's religion of humanity and Rosenberg's Mythos be considered as religious myths investigation might indicate that the myth of Comte is syntactically true and yet semantically and pragmatically false; or that the myth of Rosenberg is pragmatically true in the short run and yet syntactically and semantically false, that is, both illogical and contrary to the facts of anthropology.

World religions like Christianity, Mohammedanism, and Buddhism have certainly been pragmatically true for various peoples over long periods of time. Christianity, especially, remains pragmatically vital today after two thousand years of history. Under the guidance of the giant intellect of great theologians such as Aquinas and Calvin these same religions have been made syntactically true or valid, providing the logical presuppositions of the formation and transformation rules of a given natural language at a given period be accepted. Semantically the mythical representations of these religions are probably true in some respects as analogies of the structures of the universe, false in other respects.

The Nature of Theological Controversy

Theological controversy results from the tension situations that arise when a religious group with one general pattern of basic attitudes, values, and meanings comes into contact with another religious group possessing a different "group-mind" and different group-interests. On the other hand, theological controversy can likewise arise when the attempt is made from within the religious group to modify the ideas or redirect the interests of the group.

Verbal controversy consists largely of arguments about interpretations of beliefs, interpretations of facts, and interpretations of words. All genuine argumentation is a matter of interpretation, which is another way of saying that all argumentation is about words and their relations. Every system of theology is a system of words -- words which express beliefs in terms of a value-system, words which designate facts in terms of value-structures of the universe, words which are implicatively correlated in terms of a system of logic. Religious tensions arise in the social process when there is a clash of interests that are regarded as of ultimate importance. This clash of interests involves a dichotomy of value-systems, each system eliciting supreme devotion, feelings of loyalty, and attitudes of conviction on the part of adherents. The value-systems take verbal form as intellectualized systems of theology. These systems of theology are mythical representations designating hypothetical value-structures of the universe.

Linguistic controversy breaks forth as a result of intellectual tension between the two conflicting systems of theology. It can move within one or all of three realms of discourse. The controversy may be about the interpretations of beliefs in which

case the debate centers about disagreement on the question of the relation of words to beliefs. Here the debate moves within the pragmatical realm of discourse. On the other hand, the controversy may be about the interpretation of facts in which case the debate centers about disagreement on the question of the relation of words to facts. Here the debate moves within the semantical realm of discourse. Then again the controversy may be purely formal, dealing with the interpretation of words in which case controversy centers about disagreement on the question of the relation of words to other words. Here the debate moves within the syntactical realm of discourse.

Controversy in the semantical realm of discourse can accomplish clarification of definitions, that is, it can clarify the semantical rules of usage so that it is possible to arrive at common definitions of what is to be considered as "factually" meaningful when value-structures are designated. Once these definitions have been established dialectic ceases for facts can now be consulted as far as possible, and once facts are mutually accepted disputation ceases until further interpretations are made about the facts accepted. Controversy in the pragmatical realm of discourse can achieve clarification of presuppositions, that is, the pragmatical rules of discourse can be clarified until it is clearly shown what beliefs or what interests are presupposed. Once this has been accomplished, genuine dialectic can go no further in this realm of discourse. Personal feelings of conviction are now affirmed on both sides and are understood as mutually incompatible. Nothing further can be accomplished by argumentation in the pragmatical realm of discourse. Controversy in the syntactical realm of discourse can achieve logical correctness and systematic perfection, that is, the transformation rules of the system can be criticized to the point where the system is shown to be invalid or to the point where it makes adjustments until it attains logical completion. By and large, theological controversy in the syntactical realm of discourse proceeds on the basis of a common fund of logical presuppositions. In the Western world, for instance, this common fund of logical presuppositions has depended upon a general acceptance of Aristotelian logic. Most of the debates of Christian theologians presupposed this logic up until very recent times.

The theory of theological controversy presented above gives an impression of neatness, but it can hardly be said to be descriptively accurate of actual controversy. Real controversies offer

a confused pattern in which discussion moves within all the realms of discourse at the same time, or at least moves from one realm of discourse to another with great fluidity. This is because theological controversy tends to bring all meanings and values into the discussion. It is, in fact, a question of disagreement as to the nature of the relationship of value-systems to the value-structures of the universe. Since this relationship is inclusive of all meanings and values, interpretations must be inclusive of all realms of discourse. This is the reason why the discourse of theological controversy involves the use of such highly generalized terms and resorts to metaphorical types of representation. If carried forward to its highest point of achievement, theological controversy yields clarification of the nature of the value-structures that should be in existence if a certain value-system that is presupposed can have any ascertainable possibility of fulfilment. Ordinarily, however, controversy fails to move on this high level and breaks up into controversies that move within the pragmatistical, semantical, and syntactical realms of discourse, confining attention to only one of these fields.

An application of sign analysis to the analysis of theological controversy can proceed somewhat after the following manner. It can point out to what extent the debate has moved within the semantical realm of discourse to yield clarification of definition. It can indicate to what extent the debate has moved within the pragmatistical realm of discourse bringing presuppositions to light. It can indicate to what extent the formal arguments are valid or invalid within a syntactical system. What is even more important, however, is that it may be able to bring to light the nature of the value-structures that should be in existence if the value-system that is advocated is to have any possibility of fulfilment. The way is opened on the one hand for speculative investigations as to what the possibilities of value-structures may be. The points where information is lacking may be indicated, and the necessity of carrying out further scientific investigation in the effort to collect more facts clearly pointed out. On the other hand, it may be made clear in what respects it is necessary to revise value-systems in the light of what the value-structures of the universe have been hitherto discovered to be.

An application of sign analysis to theological controversy can serve to bring the presupposed conflicting value-systems under focus, so that mutual interests and conflicting interests can be

recognized. It can then point out the extent to which immediate co-operation is possible on the basis of common interests already established. In the case of irreconcilable conflicting interests it can point out the necessity of seeking new information in an effort to test the adequacies of those interests for the fulfilment of the possibilities of value. That is, it can point out the necessity of keeping tension-situations from breaking forth into overt conflict until additional information is available that will throw light on the extent to which the respective value-systems correspond to the actual value-structures of the universe. Thus, verbal controversy might be developed into a precise technique whereby it could function as one of the techniques whereby "organisms can create their own environment," to use a phrase from Whitehead. The possibilities for developing such a technique have never been fully explored, and it may be that the method of sign analysis can be of service here. This possibility should at least be held open until further work on the method makes it possible to test it more thoroughly than it has been tested in the past.

In the Middle Ages the theologian was given training in the three liberal arts of Grammar, Rhetoric, and Dialectic. These disciplines were considered essential, for in this period of the hegemony of theology, the theologians were aware that wherever theology and religion were to be found, there problems of a controversial nature would arise; and that from these controversies theology could gain effective methods and valuable material for its imposing structure. The scholastics were right in this judgment. We suggest that the discipline of sign analysis be substituted as a modern substitute for the Trivium with the hope that it will serve a similar purpose, that is, that it will direct theological thinking into systematic channels, that it will establish precision of definition, and that it will yield theological synthesis and mutual agreement. In this case, however, the synthesis is not expected to remain static, but can be dynamic and capable of infinite flexibility.

Possibilities of Sign Analysis for Philosophy of Religion

The technique of sign analysis enables us to distinguish the general characteristics of religious discourse and to indicate in a tentative way how the analysis of language of disputants can aid in clarifying and resolving differences of opinion on religious meaning.

It must be noted, however, that religious discourse is one of the most complex of all types of discourse; and the techniques of sign analysis must be sharpened and elaborated before they can be easily applied for the practical purposes of the theologian and the philosopher of religion. The scientific study of signs is still in its infancy and remains, by and large, a theoretical but by no means a speculative study. A sound theoretical foundation has been established in outline form. Detailed elaborations of the methodology and effective practical applications in philosophy of religion remain tasks for future investigation. On the other hand, there are no indications that elaborations and refinements of the techniques of sign analysis cannot be made that will permit a much more adequate analysis of religious discourse than is possible at the present moment.

We suggest that the method of sign analysis may be a useful tool for philosophy of religion in the following ways.

(1) The method enables the philosopher of religion to construct a theory of religious discourse that can give an empirically validated interpretation of religious experiences had by means of language. Although the theory of religious discourse that we have offered may not be invulnerable at all points, we believe that it clears the way for the construction of a more conclusive theory and that it indicates the general form that a satisfactory theory will ultimately take.

(2) The method offers a technique by which the "meanings" of religious statements can be brought out from beneath the clouds of any of the manifold types of confused verbiage to stand in the clear light of intersubjective comprehension. The emphasis on the semantical dimension of meaning as an indispensable element in all religious propositions that claim to be true statements about reality, compels such propositions to be capable of reductive redefinition to the point where observable thing-properties can be shown to be basic for the truth value of these propositions. In this way propositions in religion may be made subject to intersubjective comprehension for all members of a society rather than for a small group that has developed and fostered an esoteric language of religion. Proceeding on this basis the propositions of religion may then be made subject to experimental testing in the life of the individual and in the community.

This does not mean necessarily that the application of the method would automatically outlaw expansive metaphysical generalization or curtail hypothetical religious speculation. As long as man thinks, he will continue to make metaphysical generalizations, and as long as man possesses religious imagination, speculative geniuses will arise to take daring leaps into the unknown. It is not the task of sign analysis to curtail these speculations, but rather to make all speculation subject ultimately to testing in the arena of man's communal striving for the fulfilment of values.

One of the important implications of the clarification of meanings in religious discourse is that the development of a more accurate terminology for the sciences about religion can now be undertaken with some possibility of attaining practical results. The general adoption among students of religion of a terminology based on the co-operative establishment of definitions of the terms used in the sciences about religion would contribute immeasurably to greater understanding and co-operative effort among investigators in these fields.

(3) Application of the method may contribute to the clarification of the nature, the task, and the unification of the religious sciences. We have pointed out that the discourse of religious living must be distinguished from discourse about religion. Since "science, in the last analysis, is language well made,"¹ we may regard the task of the intellectual disciplines that study religious phenomena as, on the one hand, that of the descriptive task of the construction of systems of language about the phenomena of religious living. This is the task of psychology of religion, sociology of religion, history of religion, and comparative religions. The discourse of these disciplines could and should be scientific discourse. On the other hand, there is a second intellectual task of the construction of systems of language about the language of religious living in order to make that religious living more effective for meeting human needs. Theology would then be secondary discourse about the primary discourse of the basic religious myth; liturgics would be secondary discourse about the discourse of worship; ethics, secondary discourse about the discourse of

Wilbur Marshall Urban, Language and Reality: The Philosophy of Language and the Principles of Symbolism (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939), p. 21.

the techniques of religious living. The discourse of these disciplines would be technological in so far as it performed the functions of setting up techniques for making religious living more effective and in so far as it performed the function of setting up techniques for persuading people to adopt this way of living. It would be scientific discourse in so far as it made references to the primary discourse of the basic myth or to discourse of worship or preaching, for example. The discourse of all theological disciplines would in this sense be religious discourse and primarily technological, since these disciplines would in turn be a part of the technique of religious living.

Finally, there must be mentioned a third intellectual task, namely, that of the construction of a system of meta-metalanguage that would analytically examine the secondary discourse of available theologies so that they might be empirically tested as to the comparative strength of their conformability to facts and the value-structures of the universe and the comparative efficacy of their techniques for enhancing values. This, it would seem, is the task of a critical philosophy of religion. On the other hand, the speculative philosopher of religion has the task of constructing new religious myths. This task requires the peculiar genius of the prophet and seer in addition to intellectual acumen.

The extent of the usefulness of a classification of the religious sciences based on the theory of signs cannot be ascertained until further application of the method is attempted. The formulation that we have suggested above cannot be considered strictly descriptive. In our opinion, however, the tasks of the religious sciences that we have outlined as fitting into the natural purview of the various disciplines, are the tasks which workers in these fields have been attempting to deal with all along in a rather haphazard and confused way. The possibilities of the introduction of the study of signs into the methodology of the religious sciences may prove to be of greater significance in this respect than in any other.

(4) As we have indicated in some detail, the method shows promise of contributing toward the end of resolving the tensions of theological controversy. It may be impractical to expect controversialists to direct their discussions along lines suggested by the theory of signs. However, the method may be of service to an intermediary reconciler who will be able to clarify at what points argu-

ments are about interpretations and at what points arguments are about facts. In the former case he can clarify terms and presuppositions and point out the necessity for tolerance or for shifting co-operative interaction to another level. In either case he can point out the necessity of searching for more facts.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the method of sign analysis cannot serve as a method in philosophy of religion that will answer all problems. It can answer questions about signs; and in this way it can be a valuable aid to epistemology, axiology, metaphysics, and other disciplines related to the work of the philosopher of religion. It cannot, however, be a substitute for these disciplines any more than it can be a substitute for philosophy of religion or theology.

